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**Promotion and protection of human rights**

## Letter dated 12 February 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to convey to you information on the measures taken by the Government of Uzbekistan to further promote human rights and strengthen the rule of law in the country with the aim of advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (see annex).

I would appreciate it if you could circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 72.

(*Signed*) Bakhtiyor **Ibragimov**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

18-02948 (E) 010318 060318

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## Annex to the letter dated 12 February 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Russian]

## Measures taken by the Government of Uzbekistan to further promote human rights and strengthen the rule of law in the country in the context of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

Today Uzbekistan has firmly established itself as an independent and sovereign State that has assumed its rightful place in the international community. Guarantees pertaining to national independence, human rights and freedoms and the development path chosen by the people of Uzbekistan have been enshrined in the national Constitution.

As noted by President Shavkat Mirziyoyez of the Republic of Uzbekistan: "The Constitution is a clear embodiment of the people's political and legal thinking. It serves as the guarantor of national independence, freedom, peace and prosperity, and provides a firm foundation for building a democratic State governed by the rule of law with a strong civil society and market economy".

In particular, the Constitution is the basis on which the Republic's legislative system, State bodies and civil society institutions have been established. Far-reaching reforms are currently under way in all areas. Steady growth can be seen in the State's socioeconomic and political potential, and Uzbek citizens have a broader world view.

The Government's main message is that people should feel the results of the reforms today, not tomorrow. Uzbekistan has adopted a strategy of action in five priority development areas for the period 2017–2021, many of the provisions of which are in keeping with the Sustainable Development Goals. Over 20 laws and 700 regulations were adopted last year alone in the context of implementing the strategy. Significant work has been carried out to implement the "people-first" message proclaimed.

Fundamental changes have been made to the role and significance of elected representative bodies — the parliament and kengashes of people's deputies — in public and political life. The powers of the legislature and political parties have been expanded, and parliamentary and public oversight institutions have been strengthened.

Consistent efforts have also been made to democratize the executive branch. The scope of the Government's functions and powers has expanded, its accountability has increased, and reporting to parliament has been strengthened. This gives practical expression to a fundamental principle enshrined in the Constitution, namely that people are the sole source of State authority.

In the context of strengthening the rule of law in Uzbekistan, a particular focus has been placed on fundamental judicial reform. To ensure consistency in jurisprudence, the Supreme Court and the Supreme Economic Court of the Republic have been merged. A Supreme Judicial Council has been established in order to prevent unlawful interference in the process of judicial selections and appointments, and to create an open, transparent and alternative system. Indefinite judicial appointments have been introduced, which has strengthened guarantees of the independence of judges with respect to the protection of civil rights.

The quality of investigations and the accountability of investigators have also been enhanced. The practice of incorporating public opinion has been established to ensure that every sentence is lawful and just. Offenders, especially young people, can be sponsored to serve non-custodial sentences by Mahalla citizens' assemblies, district and municipal councils of the Youth Union of Uzbekistan and women's committees, which gives them an opportunity to get back on track.

A presidential decree was adopted on additional measures to strengthen safeguards of civil rights and freedoms during investigative work, to maintain the rule of law and impartiality when evidence is collected and assessed. The decree prohibits torture, psychological or physical pressure and forms of violence. Pretrial detention centres and temporary detention facilities will be equipped with video monitoring equipment.

In criminal cases, the use of any data obtained illegally is strictly forbidden. The falsification of evidence will be specifically criminalized. In turn, in a criminal case lawyers are now entitled to collect and submit evidence that must be reviewed and assessed by the investigative and judicial authorities.

Citizens misled into crime, or who have shown genuine remorse, are given an opportunity to reintegrate into society and their families. Accordingly, for the first time in the history of Uzbekistan, the President of the country signed a decree in 2017 pardoning 2,700 persons convicted by the courts.

The work of the law enforcement agencies has also fundamentally changed. An entirely new system has been established to prevent violations of the law and combat crime. Rather than combating the consequences of crime, priority is now given to the timely prevention of illegal acts.

The consistent efforts of the Government of Uzbekistan to ensure the enjoyment of human rights have been commended by Zaid Read Al Hussein, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and by Ahmed Shaheed, Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on freedom of religion or belief, both of whom visited the Republic for the first time last year.

In order to demonstrate its firm commitment to respecting and promoting human rights, and also to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Uzbekistan intends to host the Asian International Forum on Human Rights in November 2018, in Samarkand.

As a State, Uzbekistan is particularly focused on promoting and protecting the rights of young people. To that end, a decree has been adopted on measures to enhance the effectiveness of State youth policy and support the work of the Youth Union of Uzbekistan. Furthermore, in his address to the seventy-second session of the General Assembly, during the general debate, President Mirziyoyez of Uzbekistan proposed the development of a United Nations convention on the rights of youth — a unified international legal instrument geared towards establishing and implementing youth policy in the context of globalization and the rapid development of information and communications technology.

The Republic is strengthening guarantees relating to freedom of economic activity, free enterprise and freedom to work, with priority accorded to consumer rights, equality opportunities and legal protection for all forms of ownership. This principle was demonstrated in practice last September by the introduction of the sum, a national currency that can be freely exchanged. Uzbekistan now has a Ministry for Innovative Development. Another newly created office is that of the Ombudsman under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan for the protection of the rights and legitimate interests of business entities.

Both State and society are particularly focused on respecting the principle of social justice, which includes creating the conditions for those in need of assistance and support, first and foremost persons with physical disabilities, to lead productive lives. In that context, a commission has been set up to make proposals to fundamentally improve the system of State support for persons with disabilities, and an in-depth study has been conducted. The decree adopted on measures to fundamentally improve the system of State support for persons with disabilities provides this category of persons with new benefits and opportunities. The adoption of specific legislation on the rights of persons with disabilities is also envisaged.

In general, the reforms under way in Uzbekistan are primarily aimed at ensuring the enjoyment of human rights and giving real power to the people in deeds, not just words. The Government is also focused on ensuring that:

- Government bodies strictly observe the constitutional principle of the pre-eminence of human rights and freedoms
- Government bodies are transparent and accountable to the people's representatives — the parliament and kengashes of people's deputies
- Health care is prioritized by improving skilled medical care, modernizing disease prevention, enhancing the efficiency of nursing and screening services, and providing accessible and high-quality medicines to the public
- Social justice is achieved with equality before the law for all citizens, irrespective of their political views, gender, ethnicity, language or religious beliefs
- Constitutional rights to freedom of thought, speech and opinion are upheld in order to build a developed democratic State and a strong civil society
- As a consistently realized principle, citizens, the State and society have shared responsibilities and mutual rights and obligations for effective cooperation between the State and individuals, or the State and society, in addressing the important tasks before the country
- Freedom of enterprise and the inviolability of private property are protected
- The rights and interest of Uzbek citizens everywhere are comprehensively protected.

In summary, it can be said that Uzbekistan has set itself the ambitious goal of becoming a developed democratic State. In that context, the wide-ranging reforms taking place in the Republic today are a clear indication that the country is moving in the right direction. The successful implementation of these reforms will be instrumental in achieving that goal.